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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000209

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: EUR A/S FRIED'S TALKS WITH GOM &
OPPOSITION LEADERS ON KOSOVO AND NATO

REF: SKOPJE 203

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Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D).

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SUMMARY

11. (C) During March 8 meetings with GOM and opposition leaders in Skopje, A/S Fried urged (and easily obtained) continued support for the Ahtisaari status proposal and asked his interlocutors to consider publicly supporting a Kosovo UNSCR as a means to bolster security in Macedonia and the region. He also warned that time is short for Macedonia to make the necessary reforms to make its case for NATO membership in 2008; there are only six months before NATO members begin assessing aspirants for membership invitations.

His government interlocutors clearly understood the NATO message; we will monitor closely to ensure follow through. They also indicated they would consider a public statement calling for a Kosovo UNSCR, but they will need prodding from us and our assurance that we will help them weather the Russian and Serbian displeasure they will incur if they do so. End Summary.

CLEAR MESSAGES ON KOSOVO AND NATO

12. (C) EUR A/S Fried, accompanied by Charge, met March 8 in Skopje with President Crvenkovski; PM Gruevski and members of his cabinet, including FM Milososki; and opposition leaders to discuss Kosovo developments and NATO membership. During his meetings, A/S Fried reviewed his earlier visits to Serbia and Kosovo, and asked for Macedonia's continued support for the Ahtisaari proposal. He urged GOM and opposition interlocutors to counter Russian suggestions that Kosovo independence would be destabilizing for Macedonia by arguing, at the UN and in other public fora, that a UNSCR endorsing the Ahtisaari proposal and guaranteeing a continued international community (IC) presence in Kosovo would, in fact, have a calming and stabilizing effect. On NATO accession, A/S Fried pointed to the need for political dialogue that would bolster internal stability, and for continued progress on implementing reforms related to the Framework Implementation and rule of law.

KOSOVO STATUS -- DEMARCATION IN TIMELY MANNER, BALANCING
RELATIONS BETWEEN BELGRADE AND PRISTINA

¶13. (C) President Crvenkovski acknowledged that, even without the Ahtisaari plan, Kosovo would end up as an independent state. He noted that the Ahtisaari plan "precisely and correctly defined" the issue of border demarcation, a key GOM concern. The government hoped for timely implementation of demarcation, in accordance with the Ahtisaari plan. PM Gruevski reiterated GOM support for the Ahtisaari plan and thanked the USG for supporting the language on demarcation.

¶14. (C) In an approach later echoed by PM Gruevski, Crvenkovski said Macedonia would have to tackle the challenge of balancing relations between Pristina and Belgrade, particularly in regard to timing in the GOM's strategy for recognition of an independent Kosovo and establishing diplomatic ties with Pristina. Ideally, a UNSCR would establish the grounds for timely recognition and establishment of diplomatic ties. The GOM would continue to build strong ties to Pristina, but the strongest guarantee for Macedonia's security would be a continued IC presence, civil and military, in Kosovo.

¶15. (C) In the event of a Russian veto of a UNSCR, Crvenkovski cautioned, the scenario would be more difficult. Any lack of EU unity on the matter would further complicate the picture for Macedonia. Macedonia would not want to be at the head of the pack of countries unilaterally recognizing Kosovo, nor would it want to lag at the back. A/S Fried told Crvenkovski that the USG would not pressure the GOM on the timing of recognition. The USG did not want Kosovo independence to strain Macedonia domestically; we would continue to stress that independence for Kosovo could not serve as a precedent in the region or elsewhere.

NATO MEMBERSHIP -- PROGRESS ON DIALOGUE, ACCELERATE REFORMS,
FWA IMPLEMENTATION

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¶16. (C) A/S Fried told his interlocutors that NATO members would begin assessing potential members around September ¶2007. Macedonia therefore had about six months in which to consolidate progress on government-opposition dialogue, and to accelerate progress on reforms, including implementation of the Framework Agreement. He pointed out that, at present, there was no consensus among NATO members on membership for Macedonia.

¶17. (SBU) Calling NATO membership Macedonia's top priority, PM Gruevski mentioned the March 6 political talks between him and DUI leader Ali Ahmeti (reftel) as evidence the GOM was taking seriously IC concerns. Gruevski said FWA implementation was proceeding, with an increased budget for equitable representation and with phase II of decentralization to begin in mid-2007 as scheduled. He hoped NATO would recognize the country's progress in combating organized crime, corruption, and trafficking in persons, as well as efforts underway to draft a liberal religious freedom law.

¶18. (C) A/S Fried said the Gruevski-Ahmeti meeting had been a good first step, but that the process needed to continue since the impasse with DUI was having a negative effect on Macedonia's NATO candidacy. He also cautioned against provoking Greece with ill-considered decisions such as the recent renaming of the Skopje Airport as "Alexander the Great" Airport. He underscored the need to show measurable progress on FWA implementation, including on equitable representation and decentralization.

OPPOSITION LEADERS ON NATO MEMBERSHIP, KOSOVO

¶19. (C) SDSM (ethnic Macedonian main opposition) President

Radmila Sekerinska said her party wanted to move faster on NATO reforms than the Gruevski government, which had "wasted time and energy" in its standoff with DUI. SDSM would support legislation required for NATO membership. DUI leader Ahmeti also underscored his party's support for NATO membership, and underscored the importance of continued U.S. support for FWA implementation.

¶10. (C) Sekerinska said she did not think developments in Kosovo would endanger stability in the country. Macedonia had "worked hard to make itself immune to problems in Kosovo" by supporting FWA implementation. She was wary of publicly calling for a UNSCR for Kosovo, since that could endanger Skopje's relations with Belgrade and lead some in Macedonia to accuse SDSM of selling out to the Kosovo Albanians. A/S Fried assured Sekerinska the US publicly would support parties in Macedonia that called for a Kosovo UNSCR as a guarantee of stability, both in Kosovo and in Macedonia.

¶11. (C) Ahmeti stressed the importance of supporting stability in the region as a means of countering Russian attempts to delay progress toward a Kosovo solution. He suggested Macedonia eventually would be seen as the "Switzerland of the Balkans," with respect for minority rights. There was no interest among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia in creating a greater Albania, which he believed would be damaging to Albanian interests. Fried urged Ahmeti to contribute to dialogue with the government; citing Poland's road to NATO in the 1990's Fried pointed out that cooperation on a NATO accession agenda did not foreclose competitive politics otherwise.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) A/S Fried's message on the need for the GOM and opposition to quickly work toward a national consensus on implementing NATO reforms in the next six months, was clearly understood. PM Gruevski later told the local press that "Macedonia is aware of the homework it needs to do, and will do it in order to enable the U.S. to argue in support of NATO membership for us." The GOM also signaled tentative willingness to make constructive public statements about a Kosovo status solution and regional stability. Skopje will need some prodding from us, however; should the Department deem such statements useful, particularly in light of contrary pressure from Belgrade and Moscow.

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displeasure they will incur in the event they make such statements.

¶13. (U) This message was cleared by A/S Fried.
WOHLERS